

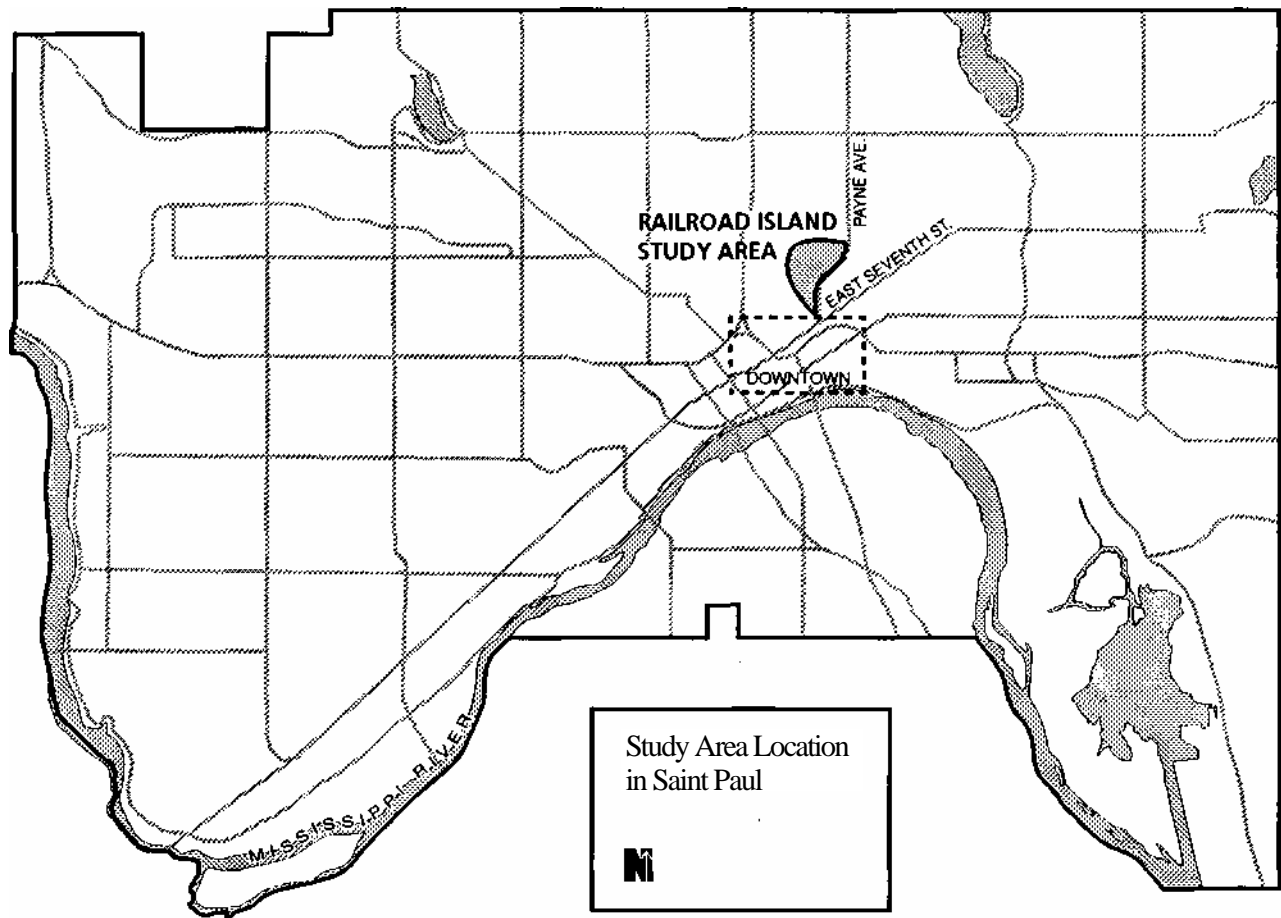


RAILROAD *ISLAND* PLAN

*An Amendment to the Land Use Chapter
of the Comprehensive Plan*

The Saint Paul Planning Commission

Adopted by the City Council
November 16, 1994



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CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
PLAN BRIEF	i - vii
INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	1
PURPOSE	1
HISTORY	2
SOCIAL ISSUES	3
HOUSING ISSUES	5
URBAN DESIGN AND INFRASTRUCTURE	12
Overall Image	12
Specific Urban Design Issues	13
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	16
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE RECOMMENDATIONS	18
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE 1	18
Organizational Planning	18
Social Community	19
Housing Revitalization	20
Urban Design	23
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE 2	36
Organizational Planning	36
Social Community	36
Housing Revitalization	36
Urban Design	36
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE 3	42
Organizational Planning	42
Social Community	42
Housing Revitalization	42
Urban Design	42
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE 4	46
Organizational Planning	46
Social Community	46
Housing Revitalization	46
Urban Design	46
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE 5	51
Organizational Planning	51
Social Community	51
Housing Revitalization	51
Urban Design	51
DESIGN GUIDELINE AND REVIEW POLICY	58
LAND USE AND ZONING	59
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW	63
NEIGHBORHOOD-WIDE FINANCIAL STRATEGIES	64
Redevelopment Plan Expansion	66
Budgetting Strategies for Housing, Urban Design and Infrastructure Improvement. . .	66
Financial Summary	66

LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>PAGE</u>
Figure 1: Swede Hollow - Circa 1910	3
Figure 2: Brunson House - Circa 1986	3
Figure 3: Homes on Mount Ida Street	5
Figure 4: Building Conditions Survey Map	9
Figure 5: Housing Survey Summary	10
Figure 6: 416 Mount Ida Street	12
Figure 7: Downtown from Rivoli Bluff	13
Figure 8: Street Sweeping Dump Site	14
Figure 9: Neighborhood Entry @ Desoto and Tedesco	14
Figure 10: New Single Family Housing Design Concepts	21
Figure 11: Garden/Green Concept	22
Figure 12: Bridge Railing Concept.	27
Figure 13: Standard Neighborhood Street Light Designs	28
Figure 14: Retaining Wall Design Concept	30
Figure 15: Wood and Iron Fence Design Concepts	30
Figure 16: Phase 1 Implementation Plan	32
Figure 17: Phase 1 Housing Improvement Projection Map	33
Figure 17A: Phase 1 Budget.	34
Figure 18: Phase 2 Implementation Plan	37
Figure 19: Phase 2 Housing Improvement Projection Map	38
Figure 19A: Phase 2 Budget.	39
Figure 20: Phase 3 Implementation Plan	43
Figure 21: Phase 3 Housing Improvement Projection Map	44
Figure 21A: Phase 3 Budget.	45
Figure 22: Phase 4 Implementation Plan	48
Figure 23: Phase 4 Housing Improvement Projection Map	49
Figure 24: Phase 4 Budget.	50
Figure 25: Phase 5 Implementation Plan	54
Figure 26: Phase 5 Housing Improvement Projection Map	55
Figure 26A: Phase 5 Budget.	56
Figure 27: Current Implementation Plans and Funding Sources for Urban Design and Infrastructure Improvements	57
Figure 28: Existing Zoning	61
Figure 29: Proposed Zoning Changes	62
Figure 30: Railroad Island Redevelopment Area Expanded Tax Increment Area Tax Increment Finance District Budget	68-71

INDEX OF APPENDIX

	PAGE
APPENDIX A: The People in Railroad Island (Demographics)	72
APPENDIX B: Existing/Proposed Zoning Districts in Railroad Island	74
APPENDIX C: Site Improvement Cost Estimates	76
APPENDIX D: Existing Utilities	81
APPENDIX E: Existing Street Conditions	82
APPENDIX F: Existing Traffic Conditions	83
APPENDIX G: District 5 Planning Council Recommended Residential Guidelines	84
APPENDIX H: Railroad Island Residential Revitalization Strategy	90
CREDITS	108

PLAN BRIEF

Railroad Island Small Area Plan

A Forty Acre Study and Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Railroad Island Small Area Plan was developed by a neighborhood-based task force appointed by the District 5 Planning Council at the request of the Planning Commission. The task force was assisted by the Department of Planning and Economic Development staff and the consulting firm of Sanders Wacker Wehrman Bergly, Inc. The plan contains specific recommendations for improvements to the houses, businesses, streets, parks, and other public places in Railroad Island. There are also recommendations for changes in zoning and specific steps for improving community life in the neighborhood. Development of this small area plan is the first step in a process to implement a variety of programs and improvements in Railroad Island that will result in greater stability, an improved quality of life for its residents, and a better condition for neighborhood businesses.

BACKGROUND

The Railroad Island Neighborhood is located in the southwest tip of the District 5, Payne Phalen area of Saint Paul. The study area is approximately 180 acres in size and is bounded by railroad tracks on the north and west, Swede Hollow Park on the east and East 7th Street on the south. The central and northwesterly portion of the neighborhood is residential. The primary retail area is located on Payne Ave., and industrial uses are concentrated along Bush

St. on the north end of the study area and between Hopkins St. and East 7th St. on the south end. There is substantial open space including Swede Hollow Park, Eileen Weida Playground, Hopkins Park, the bluff and slope areas south and west of Rivoli St. and in other scattered areas throughout the neighborhood.

Historically, the majority of the housing in Railroad Island has been single-family and owner-occupied. Many neighborhood residents worked at the nearby brewery, Whirlpool, 3-M and other east-side and downtown businesses. In recent years, closings and employment cut-backs have taken jobs and, with them, economic and social stability from the neighborhood. Owner-occupied housing slowly converted to rental units which generally has resulted in a lower level of maintenance of the neighborhood's housing. The aging buildings have begun to deteriorate and, currently, most of the housing is in need of some rehabilitation. A major goal of this plan is to recommend effective strategies for rehabilitation of existing houses in the neighborhood.

The transition from predominantly owner-occupied housing to the current situation, where approximately 70 percent of the units are rental, has resulted in an increase in social problems. Concerns about crime and related social issues were expressed frequently throughout the planning process. The proposed housing revitalization strategies and other physical

improvements proposed for the neighborhood in the plan may help to attract residents committed to the neighborhood and gradually reduce crime and other social problems. The plan also includes information on existing social-action programs and recommendations for new programs and strategies that may help to make Railroad Island a stronger and more stable community.

Railroad Island has physical characteristics that add to its excellent potential to become, once again, a healthy and stable neighborhood. It has architecture that is rich in character, extensive parks and open spaces, well defined boundaries and is close to downtown and major traffic routes. A major goal of the plan is to recommend urban design concepts and infrastructure improvements that will build on these attributes and help to revitalize the residential, commercial and public spaces in the neighborhood. Urban design concepts include recommendations for improvements to commercial areas but commercial revitalization is not a major focus of the plan.

Existing land uses in Railroad Island and future developments and redevelopments are largely determined by the zoning of neighborhood properties. The plan includes recommendations for rezoning that are intended to encourage land uses that support the plan's vision for the neighborhood.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The physical improvements and other strategies related to housing, social, urban, design, and zoning issues would be implemented over several years depending upon the availability of funding and other resources required to implement the plan's recommendations. Some programs will be implemented throughout Railroad Island and other strategies may concentrate in specific

targeted areas as mutually agreed to by neighborhood residents and implementing partners. This plan differs from small area plans for other Saint Paul neighborhoods in that Railroad Island is eligible for tax increment finance (TIP) monies as part of the City's scattered site housing redevelopment district. In addition to financial resources that may be available from the TIP program, the plan identifies other potential funding resources to implement plan recommendations, including existing City grant and loan programs, the City's biennial capital improvement budgeting process, State and Federal funds, and private investment.

The plan identifies many needs and opportunities for Railroad Island. The extent to which those needs and opportunities can be addressed will depend on the availability of funding sources, and the willingness of neighborhood organizations, development groups, the City, and Railroad Island residents to work together to bring about the improvements that will make railroad Island the kind of neighborhood this plan envisions.

Following plan adoption, the implementation process will begin. Key players in the process should include a neighborhood improvement facilitator and community organizer; the neighborhood improvement (plan implementation) task force; Merrick Community Center; the District 5 Planning Council; the East Side Neighborhood Development Company (ESNDC) and other non-profit housing development agencies; the City's Planning and Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works Departments; the Saint Paul Area Board of Realtors and area foundations. As implementation activities are organized, other groups and organizations may also play key roles in implementing portions of the plan.

SOCIAL ISSUES

The social fabric of a neighborhood is one of the key factors considered by people in deciding whether they want to live in a particular neighborhood. Concerns about safety, education, community services, recreation and community pride influence perceptions of a neighborhood's social health. The major recommendations related to social issues in Railroad Island are:

1. **Block Clubs:** Organize block clubs throughout Railroad Island.
2. **Community Services:** Enlist participation from existing community organizations, such as Merrick Community Center and St. Ambrose Church, to assist in providing additional services and activities in the neighborhood and to strengthen the sense of community.
3. **FORCE Program:** Implement the Police Department's FORCE program where needed and improve communication between the Police and the Block Clubs to address criminal activity, violence and nuisance properties.
4. **Neighborhood Businesses:** Encourage continued involvement of the Payne Arcade Business Association in the neighborhood's commercial development.
5. **Neighborhood Task Force:** Continue the Railroad Island community task force to provide leadership for the neighborhood revitalization.

6. **Social Programs:** Seek out available resources for funding social programs and community services.

7. **Jobs:** Provide neighborhood access to job training, job referral and job placement.

8. **Town Hall:** Establish a meeting place for both organized and casual neighborhood social and political activity.

9. Neighborhood Improvement Facilitator and Community

Organizer: Find funding to hire a neighborhood improvement facilitator and community organizer for Railroad Island to assist the neighborhood in implementing the plan's recommended improvement activities.

10. **Youth:** Reestablish programs in the community for youth recreation and other activities.

HOUSING ISSUES

Railroad Island has 248 owner-occupied, single family homes and 509 rental units in a total of 397 structures. The majority of buildings are in average or below average condition, however, most of the larger multi-family buildings are relatively new and in better condition. The neighborhood has affordable, rental housing that is maintaining its value as well as similar housing in the rest of the City and is attractive to people seeking such housing. The City's adopted housing plan, **Saint Paul Housing Policy for the 1990's**, emphasizes the importance of keeping affordable, well-maintained rental housing in the City. However, in Railroad Island, too many of the homes designed for

owner-occupants have been converted to rental units. Approximately 70 percent of housing units in the neighborhood are rental. The improvement of area housing, particularly its rental housing, is among the community's highest priorities. The goal is to provide a mixture of ownership and rental housing, meeting the needs of a wide spectrum of households. An ambitious program is required to attract families who are interested in buying homes and staying for the long term to provide stability for the neighborhood.

The plan includes a number of housing revitalization strategies that recommend a variety of improvements to the existing housing stock, replacement of certain deteriorated structures and infill of new homes on vacant lots. The intent will be to provide some immediate rehab programs throughout Railroad Island with additional activities in areas targeted by the neighborhood. It is essential that the neighborhood is brought together and not divided by confining activities to specific areas. A variety of activities occurring across Railroad Island will increase resident enthusiasm and participation in neighborhood improvements. The major housing recommendations are:

1. **Private Investment:** Implement a revitalization strategy that uses government incentives to leverage additional private investment.
2. **Block Clubs:** Organize Block Clubs in target areas to assist in providing information on housing revitalization programs.
3. **Marketing Plan:** Develop and implement a marketing plan

that focuses on the strengths of the neighborhood.

4. **Financial Assistance:** Offer financial assistance, such as loans and grants, to stimulate private investment and build confidence in the neighborhood.
5. **Home Ownership:** Emphasize home ownership in Railroad Island.
6. **Traditional Character:** Maintain the traditional character of existing homes in an affordable manner and design new construction to be compatible with existing architecture.
7. **Infrastructure and Urban Design:** Coordinate infrastructure and urban design improvements with housing improvements in implementation to gain maximum impact.
8. **Substandard Homes:** Remove existing substandard homes.
9. **Rehabilitate Homes:** Rehabilitate existing homes wherever feasible.
10. **Rental Properties:** Improve management and maintenance of rental properties.
11. **Parking:** Provide off-street parking where needed.

12. **Rezoning:** Down-zone certain residential areas to maintain the existing character and promote owner-occupied, single family homes.
13. **Vacant Houses:** Acquire vacant houses for rehabilitation or demolition and acquire open lots that are potential sites for infill development.
14. **Termite Eradication Plan:** Develop plan/program to address termite issues in the neighborhood. This must be addressed prior to proceeding with any housing initiative.

URBAN DESIGN CONCEPTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Urban design is about creating an urban environment that is functional and attractive and that uplifts the spirits of those who live, work or visit there. It is about our physical surroundings including land use, circulation systems, buildings and open space and how these components are integrated to help create a viable and healthy community. Effective urban design is achieved within a social, economic, political context and is the result of coordinated public and private decisions.

A basic urban design concept referred to as the "Garden / Green" concept is proposed for the neighborhood. It suggests that a network of connected open spaces and gardens be used to visually tie the community together. The concept would provide an urban design and infrastructure framework for the community. The range of physical improvements that could be developed as part of the Garden / Green concept would include:

1. **Swede Hollow:** The plan recommends improved access, activity areas, lighting, landscaping. The improvements would complement the proposed Burlington Northern Regional Trail scheduled for construction in Swede Hollow in 1994.

2. **Rivoli West Slope:** This wooded slope located adjacent to the railroad tracks on the west edge of the neighborhood should be developed for open space and recreational activities after the street sweeping dump site is closed in 1995.

3. **Railroad Yards:** The railroad companies should be encouraged to develop landscaped buffer areas; to landscape right-of-way embankments and to remove debris from railroad properties.

4. **North-South Pedestrian Link at Tedesco:** The plan recommends construction of a pedestrian passage in line with Burr St. and between Labor Plaza and adjacent single family homes. This would re-establish a link between Tedesco St. and North St. and between the north and south areas of Railroad Island.

5. **Parks:** The plan recommends that "pocket parks" be developed on selected vacant properties, that Hopkins Park be developed as a pocket park

and that consideration be given to separating incompatible basketball and young children activities at Eileen Weida Park.

6. **Streetscape:** A new system of lighting, landscaping, signage, retaining walls, fences, etc. should be used to improve neighborhood streets.

7. **Neighborhood Entries:** Landscaping and special features should be located at the entries to help establish an identity for Railroad Island.

8. **Residential / Industrial Buffer Zones:** Buffer zones should be constructed to mitigate land use conflicts in the north and south areas where residential properties abut industrial and commercial uses.

9. **St. Paul Tennis Club: The** plan recommends that the appearance of the building and site be upgraded with new landscaping and exterior building improvements.

10. **Gardens:** Existing and new open spaces should be considered for a variety of unique gardens that would be designed to reflect the special character of Railroad Island.

11. **Community Clean-up: An** organized clean-up program should be started for both public and private properties to give impetus to the "Garden / Green" concept and to improve the appearance and image of

the neighborhood.

12. **Parking:** To alleviate the parking problems in residential areas, the plan proposes that clusters of garages be constructed at key locations and that they be cooperatively owned by benefiting residents.

13. **Overhead Utilities:** Electric, telephone and cable TV lines are often unsightly and should be placed underground whenever possible.

14. **Traffic Control Devices: The** plan recommends that stop signs and eventually stoplights be installed at Tedesco and Burr and that driver-alert signs be installed at streets flanking Eileen Weida Playground.

15. **Dump Site:** The Public Works Department plans to discontinue dumping of street sweepings at the dump site in 1995. The plan recommends that an engineering analysis be made to search for contaminants and to identify all other physical and technical constraints that may affect reuse of the property. The site should be stabilized and eventually developed for recreation use.

16. **Community Focal Point: The** plan recommends that the Merrick Community Center, the Yarusso / Morelli commercial cluster and Bedford St. houses be defined and developed as the community core. Providing a place for community meetings

and developing a community garden between Merrick Center and Beaumont St. would help to strengthen this concept.

17. **Drewry Lane Area:** This strategic area should be considered for mixed use development of low to medium density.
18. **Rivoli Bluff:** Single family homes with a style appropriate to the community character should be developed along Rivoli St.
19. **Tedesco / DeSoto Area:** Single family homes should be developed in this area.

Urban design concepts and infrastructure improvements are scheduled for implementation, along with housing improvements.

LAND USE AND ZONING

The following are the major recommendations related to land use and zoning: (1) Down-zone most RM-2 (multi-family) areas to RT-1 (single family, duplex) to encourage development of single-family and two-family structures. This would also discourage conversion of existing single-family structures to multi-family units and would encourage the restoration of divided structures back to single family use; (2) Rezone additional areas in the neighborhood so that zoning reflects current land uses that are considered appropriate for the properties.

DESIGN GUIDELINES AND REVIEW POLICY

The plan recommends that the approved District 5 Planning Council's Residential Design Guidelines, attached and made a part of the Railroad Island Small Area Plan, be considered in the rehabilitation of existing residential buildings and sites and for new housing development projects. The guidelines are intended to help reinforce Railroad Island's special character and urban location. Additional guidelines may be developed for specific projects as they are proposed for rehabilitation of existing, non-residential buildings and sites and for new public and private development projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A review of environmental conditions in the neighborhood was conducted to determine if there are any sites that are environmentally sensitive, have been contaminated or support commercial activity that handles hazardous materials. The street sweeping dump site, operated by the Saint Paul Public Works Department and located at the western terminus of Minnehaha Ave., is the only environmental issue identified. The City plans to cease dumping at the site in 1995.

NEIGHBORHOOD-WIDE FINANCIAL STRATEGIES

The Department of Planning and Economic Development has tentatively identified funding sources through Tax Increment Financing and other existing programs that may be used to finance improvements and strategies recommended in the plan.